

*These notes refer to the Justice Act (Northern Ireland)
2015 (c.9) which received Royal Assent on 24 July 2015*

Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2015

EXPLANATORY NOTES

OVERVIEW

Victims and Witnesses

16. Part 4 of the Act contains provisions that will improve the experience of victims and witnesses in the criminal justice system, clearly setting out the services that are to be provided and the standard of service that victims and witnesses can expect to receive. Given the duties that will be imposed on criminal justice agencies it should also give rise to a greater focus on the needs of victims and witnesses across the criminal justice system. Combined with changes to reduce undue delay this should lead to a substantial improvement in the victims and witnesses experience of the criminal justice system.
17. The establishment of Victim and Witness Charters are key strands of the new five year strategy for victims and witnesses of crime. Too often victims and witnesses are unclear as to what services are available to them, when they should be provided with information on their case and what measures are available to provide them with support and help them give their best evidence where they attend court as a witness.
18. The Victim and Witness Charters will address this by clearly setting out what services are to be provided to victims, the standards of service they can expect to receive and a clear indication of how they should be treated by specified criminal justice agencies.
19. A key concern for victims is getting adequate support to meet their needs as they move through the criminal justice system and being provided with information on the progress of their case, even if that is simply to say that there has been no change. The Victim and Witness Charters will make the journey through the criminal justice system easier and simpler by clearly setting out the services that are available, who provides these services and the key stages in the process that victims and witnesses can expect to receive information on their case (including when and from whom). The Charter will also make clear who to contact should the service provided not be as expected or entitlements set out under the Charter are not provided
20. Providing a statutory entitlement to be afforded the opportunity to make a victim personal statement will ensure that victims can make their views known

about the impact of the offence, ahead of sentencing, where a person is convicted of a crime. Given that there should also be increased awareness of the ability to make a statement, this will assist in improving victim's experience of the criminal justice system.

21. Finally, the Act makes provision to enable relevant details of victims and witnesses of crime to be shared by the police and Public Prosecution Service, to certain criminal justice system service providers, in order that they can be advised of relevant support services and information schemes. The purpose is to ensure that victims and witnesses are provided with relevant information, at the appropriate time, about available services and can make an informed decision about whether or not to avail of those services.